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Bush vs Andropov: a spook scorecard

By GUY HAWTIN

VICE President George Bush's long face at the Brezhnev rites had little to do with his feelings for the dear departed.

He'd just had his first face-to-face with Yuri Andropov, Russia's new boss — the guy who thrashed his team to a pulp in the 1976-77 International Intelligence World Series.

Bush can hardly be blamed for the fact that his appointment as manager of the CIA Angels came at a time when the club's reputation reached its nadir.

And Andropov's KGB Stealers were walked to their stunning victory by America's own umpires, after a hurried rewriting of the rulebook.

They declared every CIA strike a ball and every home run a foul ball. And just for good measure the U.S. team was ordered to play blindfolded.

On Dec. 17, 1975, the very day of Bush's confirmation by the Senate Armed Services Committee as the new head of the CIA, congressional staffers leaked damaging details of CIA operations in southern Africa.

A week later Bush was wrestling with security problems which followed the assassination of the Athens CIA chief, who was fingered along with many other senior operatives by rogue agent Philip Agee.

Leaks from the Senate investigations of the agency — coupled with open testimony by CIA officials — provided Andropov with a windfall of extraordinary information.

This included the revelation of bizarre plots to murder Cuban strongman Fidel Castro and details of the 1974 attempt to salvage a sunken Russian nuclear missile in co-operation with billionaire recluse Howard Hughes.

At the same time, Andropov — handpicked by Brezhnev to run the KGB's "state-within-a-state" in 1967 — was notching up his own successes.

● Some 15,000 Cuban regulars stationed in Angola consolidated the Soviet's hold on a vital chunk of Africa.

● The CIA and State Dept. stood by helplessly during a bloodbath in Ethiopia following the Russian-inspired coup against the Emperor Haile Selassie, America's long-time ally.

● "The Falcon and the Snowman" were leaking America's innermost secrets about its most important spy satellite system to Andropov's agents in Mexico.

● Geoffrey Prime, just jailed for 35 years on espionage charges in Britain, was hanging around with his KGB contacts in Vienna telling them how the CIA could eavesdrop on everything in Russia from Politburo phone calls to tank commanders in battle.

The list could go on.

While the Senate was tut-tutting about the ethics of putting a depilatory in Fidel Castro's coffee, Andropov's men were planning to murder East-bloc defectors with umbrellas that fired poison pellets.

When the American public recoiled at revelations that the CIA had for 20 years been steaming open private letters and bugging officials in Micronesia, KGB agents were rounding up dissenters and putting them in mental hospitals.

As Sen. Frank Church's Select Committee on Intelligence paved

the way for a wholesale "housecleaning" of the agency, Andropov's agents were destabilizing the Shah's Iran regime and training the young thugs who seized the hostages.

While shamefaced American newsmen confessed that they had occasionally talked to CIA contacts, KGB agents using journalist's credentials roamed the capitol on wide-ranging intelligence gathering operations.

Small wonder that Andropov looked so smug. Masters who manipulate the pieces do not expect to come face-to-face.